

The Mercury News

South Bay wineries rake in medals at competition

BY LAURA NESS | MARCH 14, 2021



It's always exciting when a local winery wins big in a local competition, and winning big this year in the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition was Lightpost Winery out of

Morgan Hill for its 2018 Reserve Cabernet from Paso Robles, which tied with a Runquist syrah to win Best Red of Show.

Made by consulting winemaker Christian Roguenant, this was classic cabernet, with a whiff of ripe blackberries and rum balls, and flavors of chocolate-covered cherries and cassis, finishing with bold, yet supple, plush tannins.

I took these tasting notes as a judge in the competition, which this year was moved from January to the first week in March.

Another Lightpost wine, the outstanding 2019 Ferrari Vineyards pinot noir, was a Best of Class winner. It stood out for its mind-blowing aromatics of strawberry rhubarb pie, cedar and forest floor and its sensational acid core.

The week prior, another Lightpost cabernet, the 2019 "Sevastian" from the Santa Cruz Mountains, was in the sweepstakes round at the East Meets West Competition, garnering lots of support and attention from the judges for its tobacco, black pepper and fine leather aromas, and savory-sweet flavors of red cherry, pomegranate, tarragon and Hatch chile compote.

The wine hailed from the Zayante Vineyard in the foothills above Los Gatos, and from Bates Ranch, on Redwood Retreat Road, the area's most sought-after cabernet and cabernet Franc vineyard. Both are farmed by renowned viticulturist Prudy Foxx.

Cabernet and chardonnay are still the big dogs on the wine industry porch, despite the increasing popularity of sauvignon blanc, pinot noir and red blends. And let's not forget rosé: There will be a lot of it on the market this year on account of all the fires and fear of smoke taint. Instead of pressing off red grapes to make red wine, many wineries elected to bleed off the juice with no skin contact to make rosé.

Local wineries winning Best of Class for their entries include Cinnabar Winery's 2017 cabernet franc and Soquel Vineyards Partners' Reserve 2017 Nebbiolo.

The grapes for the latter wine came from Lago Lomita Vineyard on Loma Prieta Avenue, not far from Loma Prieta Winery. The vineyard is owned by Mark and Robin Porter and farmed by Foxx. The Nebbiolo had aromas and flavors of red licorice, root beer, cream soda and nutmeg.

Cinnabar—whose winemaker, George Troquato, has been with them as long as they've been making wine—also scored Gold for their 2018 Santa Lucia Highlands pinot noir and their 2019 Santa Cruz Mountains chardonnay, which is always a big hit with judges for its lush orchard and citrus fruit.

Cooper-Garrod Estate Vineyards in Saratoga earned gold for its 2015 Santa Cruz Mountains F-104 Starfighter Test Pilot red syrah blend, the 2018 Santa Cruz Mountains pinot noir and the 2018 Santa Cruz Mountains Estate chardonnay, and also scored a silver for its 2018 Two Vineyards cabernet sauvignon.

Fellom Ranch Vineyards in Cupertino scored gold for their 2018 Santa Cruz Mountains/Santa Clara Valley Bellicitti Vineyard zinfandel, and silver for both their 2017 Sonoma County Russian River Valley chardonnay and 2016 Santa Cruz Mountains Montebello Ridge cabernet sauvignon. You can literally see Ridge from Fellom Ranch, and you can taste the signature tobacco leaf, sage and dried cherry of this toasty mountaintop that overlooks Silicon Valley.

Naumann Vineyards, also located on Montebello Ridge Road, scored silver for their 2018 Santa Cruz Mountains chardonnay.

Perrucci Family Vineyard, up on Kennedy Road above Los Gatos, came away with two double golds, one for the excellent 2017 Santa Cruz Mountains syrah, filled with mountain spice and pepper, and one for the 2018 Santa Cruz Mountains Regan Vineyard merlot, one of my favorite wines they produce. They also scored a silver for the 2017 Santa Cruz Mountains sangiovese.

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